

	GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL			
	Chapter:	(14) Resource Development	Effective Date:	March 2015
	Policy Title:	Initial Family Evaluation Administrative Requirements		
	Policy Number:	14.10	Previous Policy #:	1014, 1015

CODES/REFERENCES

Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006
Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-191)

REQUIREMENTS

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall initiate a written comprehensive Family Evaluation or assessment of each prospective caregiver upon receipt of their application to become a foster or adoptive parent. The evaluation shall be completed no later than eight weeks after the applicant completes all pre-service activities, including pre-service training, at least three in-home consultations, and submission of all requested verifications, forms, and other documentation. A new Family Evaluation is required for each subsequent adoption.

DFCS shall utilize only IMPACT Family Centered Practice (FCP) certified personnel to train and assess prospective foster and adoptive parents¹. Assessors must have completed IMPACT Leader training (offered exclusively through the DFCS Education and Training Section) or other approved pre-service leader training. Assessors may be certified DFCS staff, Child Placing Agency (CPA) staff, or approved contractors.

DFCS shall ensure the initial Family Evaluation and subsequent reevaluations are signed by the final approving authority. For DFCS homes, it is the DFCS Director/Designee. For CPA homes, it is the CPA Director/Designee. The final approving authority must have participated in the IMPACT FCP or other approved pre-service training overview class, or be a fully certified pre-service training leader via the DFCS Education and Training Section.

DFCS shall submit a completed, written Family Evaluation with all applicable documents and verifications to the County Director/Designee for approval far enough in advance for the entire approval process to be completed within eight weeks from the final IMPACT FCP session or final in-home consultation (whichever occurs last). The Family Evaluation must include a recommendation for approval or disapproval of each applicant home within the written evaluation. The County Director/Designee has 10 business days to review and make the approval decision, which is part of the eight-week timeframe.

¹ CPAs may also utilize the following nationally recognized pre-service training programs: Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP); Parents as Tender Healers (PATH); Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE); or Treatment Parent Readiness Training.

DFCS shall complete regular evaluations on families in Georgia (fostering or adopting) from another state within a 60-day timeframe in accordance with the Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006. The local DFCS must complete the evaluation and document in Georgia SHINES within 45 calendar days of case assignment from the Georgia Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) Administrator (see policy [15.3 ICPC: Placement of Children from other States into Georgia](#)).

DFCS shall complete ICPC Regulation 7 (Expedited placement) requests within a 20-day timeframe. The local DFCS must complete the evaluation within 15 days of case assignment from the Georgia ICPC Administrator (see policy [15.4 ICPC: Expedited Placements](#)).

DFCS shall terminate the assessment process for applicants who do not submit all required documentation within 60 days of completion of IMPACT FCP.

DFCS shall provide written notification to applicants regarding their approval status within five business days of the approval decision.

DFCS shall track changes in the household of approved caregivers and maintain current information regarding each home in the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (Georgia SHINES).

DFCS and Child Placing Agencies (CPAs) shall require their foster and adoptive parents to sign the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Notice of Privacy Practices.

Caregivers shall complete the following three phase approval process:

1. Inquiry;
2. Information Session;
3. Pre-Service Training and Home Evaluation.

After approval, DFCS shall document changes to a family's household or circumstances as an addendum to the most current home evaluation (see policy [14.14 Resource Development: Family Evaluation Addendums](#)).

PROCEDURES

Caregiver Approval Process (Phase 1: Inquiry)

1. Prospective caregivers will inquire about becoming foster or adoptive parents by calling the information line (1-877-210-KIDS).
2. Resource Development (RD) staff will mail or email prospective caregivers an informational brochure.
3. RD staff will invite prospective caregivers to attend an Information Session.

Caregiver Approval Process (Phase 2: Information Session)

1. Prospective caregivers attend a group or individual Information Session and are provided information about the Child Welfare System, the various types of caregivers, safety screening requirements, and other general information about being a caregiver.
2. Each prospective caregiver is given a Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) composed of questions for them to consider as they make their decision whether to

proceed or opt-out of the evaluation process.

3. Each prospective caregiver is given the following handouts which **must be completed and returned** if the prospective caregiver wishes to initiate the Family Evaluation process:
 - a. Prospective Caregiver Application;
 - b. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Notice of Privacy Practices (NPP);
 - c. Child Protective Services (CPS) History Request form;
NOTE: A Child Placing Agency (CPA) may only obtain CPS History, policy violations, and other child welfare information through the State Office Special Investigations Unit (SIU); County DFCS offices are not permitted to respond to such requests.
 - d. Live Scan Application Form;
 - e. Prior Caregiver Service Report;
 - f. Reasons for Fostering Checklist.
4. Each prospective caregiver is given the following additional documents:
 - a. Foster Care Information Fact Sheet; and
 - b. Personal Informational Disclosure Statement.
5. Prospective caregivers who decide to proceed with the evaluation process **must return** the documents listed in Step 3 (a-f) above.
6. After receiving the requested documents, DFCS will review the information and initiate caregiver safety screening (see policy [14.3 Resource Development: Caregiver Safety Screening at Initial and Re-evaluation](#)). The safety screening process should be initiated as soon as possible following the receipt of the paperwork from the Information Session. If results are satisfactory, the first in-home consultation is to be scheduled.

Caregiver Approval Process (Phase 3: Pre-Service Training and Home Evaluation)

1. Resource Development (RD) staff will conduct the first in-home consultation with applicants and do the following:
 - a. Answer questions applicants may have formulated since the Information Session;
 - b. Discuss the remaining assessment process;
 - c. Discuss the SAQ and Reasons for Foster Checklist;
 - d. Develop a plan with the applicants to complete required documentation, criminal records checks, medical evaluations, drug screening, CPR/First Aid training, and pre-service training;
 - e. Direct applicants to the online Foster Parent Manual;
 - f. Schedule applicants for IMPACT Family Centered Practice (FCP).
2. RD staff will provide applicants the forms and instructions needed for obtaining required medical evaluations, drug screening, and CPR/First Aid training:
 - a. Prospective Foster or Adoptive Parent Medical Evaluation Report;
 - b. Other Household Member Medical Evaluation Report;
3. RD staff will provide applicants with a personalized list of documentation and other verifications needed to complete the evaluation process. Applicants are given the Evaluation Paperwork Packet (EPP) consisting of the following:
 - a. Family Assessment Questionnaire;
 - b. Couples Questionnaire (as applicable);

- c. Single Applicant Questionnaire (as applicable);
 - d. Children's Questionnaire (as applicable);
 - e. Safety and Quality Standards (SQS) Acknowledgement Statement;
 - f. Caregiver Reference List;
 - g. Release of Information;
 - h. Available Time Scale;
 - i. Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test;
 - j. Foster Parent Role Performance Scale;
 - k. Cultural Receptivity Scale;
 - l. Social Readjustment Rating Scale;
 - m. Sensitive Issues Inventory; and
 - n. Financial Statement and verification documents (e.g., pay stubs, income tax return, etc.).
4. Applicants will attend IMPACT FCP and submit their EPP by the end of the fourth module of classroom training. The second in-home consultation is scheduled after the EPP has been submitted.
 5. RD staff will conduct the second in-home consultation with applicants and do the following:
 - a. Interview all household members;
 - b. Assess the home environment and ensure it meets environmental standards (see policy [14.11 Resource Development: Initial Family Evaluation Components](#)) including items such as the following:
 - i. Functioning smoke detector on each floor;
 - ii. Functioning carbon monoxide detector on sleeping level;
 - iii. Fully charged ABC rated fire extinguisher.
 - c. Review documents from the EPP including responses to questions;
 - d. Determine each applicant's progress toward completing their required medical evaluation and drug screen, and obtaining CPR/First Aid certification;
 - e. Determine each applicant's progress toward obtaining verifications needed based on their individual circumstances and identify those still needed, such as the following:
 - i. Auto Insurance
 - ii. Drivers License
 - iii. Citizenship Confirmation
 - iv. Marriage License/Divorce Decrees
 - v. Birth Certificates
 - vi. Immunization Records for household members under age 18
 - vii. Pet Vaccination Record
 - viii. Water/Sewage Bill or Environmental Statement
 - f. Schedule the third in-home consultation after all paperwork, medical evaluations, drug screens, and verifications have been satisfactorily completed. Preferably all screening requirements, paperwork, and verifications will be completed by the end of IMPACT training.
 6. RD staff will assess information received, ensure all references have been requested, and create questions for the final in-home consultation.
 7. RD staff will conduct the third in-home consultation with applicants and do the following:

- a. Conduct final interviews;
 - b. Confirm all screening, paperwork and verifications are complete.
 - c. Complete the Caregiver Placement Preferences Form.
8. RD staff will ensure the written Family Evaluation is completed and submitted to the designated approving authority for final approval (i.e., DFCS County Director or Designee).
 - a. The approving authority must review and make a final approval decision and sign and date the Family Evaluation within 10 business days of receiving the completed Family Evaluation. The date the final approving authority signs the Family Evaluation is the official approval date of the caregiver's home. Electronic signatures are acceptable in Georgia SHINES.
 - b. Families who do not meet the Safety and Quality standards shall not be approved.
 - c. If approved, caregivers may be reimbursed for certain expenses incurred during the approval process. The guidelines are in the COSTAR manual located at <http://ffs.dhs.ga.gov/ffs/manuals/costar/index.php>.
9. RD staff will send applicants a letter notifying them of the final approval decision. A home visit will be scheduled with approved caregivers for the reviewing and signing of the Caregiver Child Safety Agreement.

Notification of Approval/Disapproval

1. Whether approved or disapproved, applicant families must be made aware of their status within five business days.
2. Approved families should be cordially welcomed to the foster/adoption team and advised of subsequent procedures.
3. Families who are not approved should be informed in an empathetic and supportive manner. If non-approval is due to an unsatisfactory criminal history, the RD Case Manager should make this information known to the family in a clear, concise, and non-judgmental manner. Initial contact may be made by telephone, immediately followed by a written letter to the family.

Addendums: Changes/Updates to Family Information after Approval

1. All approved homes types, including relative, foster, adoptive, and ICPC families, are required to inform the agency of significant changes in their circumstances within one business day of the occurrence of the change (see policy [14.14 Resource Development: Family Evaluation Addendums](#)).
2. Any changes/updates regarding a home must be documented in Georgia SHINES.
3. For children placed in CPA foster homes, CPAs work with a Resource Maintainer in the Office of Provider Management (OPM).
4. For children placed in CPA adoptive homes, the CPA works with a Resource Maintainer in the State Permanency Unit regarding changes/updates.
5. Any DFCS staff with knowledge of changes within an approved home must contact the RD case manager to share this information. A team approach is necessary to ensure the agency maintains the most current information regarding approved placement resources.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Applicants

After submitting the Prospective Caregiver Application and other initial required documents, prospective caregivers are referred to as “applicants” until they attain final approval.

Who is qualified to complete the Family Evaluation/Assessment?

Certified DFCS Social Services Case Managers (SSCM), CPA Case Support Workers, CPA Case Support Supervisors, or contractors may qualify as an assessor and are able to complete the Family Evaluation. Foster parent co-leaders may not complete the Family Evaluation. A private contractor may complete the Family Evaluation if he/she:

1. Has a minimum of a bachelor’s level of education in Social Work, Counseling, Psychology, or a related field (four years of experience leading pre-service training may substitute for the educational requirement);
2. Has the ability to understand and implement the philosophy and conceptualizations inherent in pre-service training;
3. Demonstrates a functional understanding of the agency’s mission;
4. Has the ability to provide thorough, well-written Family Evaluations with supported recommendations; and
5. Has successfully completed IMPACT FCP Leader Training offered through the DFCS Education and Training Section.

Completing the Family Evaluation

The Family Evaluation (also referred to as the Family Assessment or Home Study) provides a profile of the family and their protective capacities. Timely completion of the Family Evaluation requires a cooperative effort between DFCS and the family. Evaluations on families who do not provide required documentation, or are otherwise not prepared to proceed with the assessment process are exempt from the timeframe requirements. Once the family provides any outstanding documents, or indicates they are prepared to proceed with the process, the six-week timeframe for completion resumes from that point. The key purpose of the assessment process is to utilize information gathered to determine if a home is a safe and suitable environment for the placement of children in foster care and if prospective caregivers and household members meet the Safety and Quality Standards. It may be helpful to create a genogram with the family during the interview process. A genogram is a visual representation of the family’s different generations.

Approval/Disapproval of the Family Evaluation

Applicants complete a Placement Preference Form, which lists their preferences regarding the number and characteristics of children to be placed in their home. The assessor will ensure final recommendations are congruent with the applicant’s desires regarding the types of special needs or other characteristics they feel they can successfully manage. What is approved at the conclusion of the Family Evaluation may differ from an applicant’s preferences. However, the final recommendations **may not** exceed the number of children requested by the applicant.

FORMS AND TOOLS

[Adult Household Member Screening Request Information](#)
[Caregiver References List](#)

Caregiver Placement Preference
Caregiver Child Safety Agreement
Child Protective Services History Request
Prospective Foster or Adoptive Parent Medical Evaluation Report
HIPAA Notice of Privacy Practices
IMPACT Material
Live Scan Application Form
Other Household Member Medical Evaluation Report
Prospective Caregiver Application
Prior Caregiver Service Report
Reasons for Fostering Checklist